

St. Thomas the Apostle Parish Religious Education Program Parent & Participant Handbook



St. Thomas the Apostle PREP guides our families to become lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ by knowing and living their Catholic faith.

***The seed of Faith is planted in Baptism,
nourished by Parents and Guardians;
Godparents and Sponsors; Priests and Catechists
by teaching and good example;
and is given growth by God
through His Grace and Sacraments
and in a loving relationship with each of us,
His people the Church.***

St. Thomas The Apostle Church
Parish Religious Education Program
Parent & Participant Handbook

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The purpose of the handbook is to set forth the guidelines for those that participate in the St. Thomas the Apostle Religious Education Program. By enrolling your child into our program, you agree to support and abide by the provisions outlined in this handbook. Parents are therefore encouraged to discuss these provisions with their children to ensure that all parties understand the requirements and obligations of their participation in the Parish Religious Education Program.

MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission at St. Thomas the Apostle PREP is to guide our families to become lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ by knowing and living their Catholic faith.

- ***We educate and nurture the children and families to know Jesus and to appreciate our Catholic faith.***
- ***We foster a community of faith in which we equip children and their families with the proper tools to develop their relationship with Jesus, through prayer, the sacraments & service.***
- ***By growing the relationships between the children and God, we encourage them to become lifelong Catholic Christians who live their faith and pass it on to the next generation.***



...we will tell to
the coming
generation
the glorious
deeds of the Lord,
and his might,
and the wonders
that he has done.

Psalm 78



OUR PROGRAM

CLASS SESSIONS and OPTIONS

Levels 1-7	Tuesday Afternoons 4:45 pm–6:00 pm
Levels 1,3,4,5,6	Home- Catechesis
Levels 4,5,6	Summer PREP

STA PREP TEAM

Our Parish Religious Education Program operates entirely through volunteer commitment of time and dedicated effort. At this time, we extend an invitation to you to join us in this rewarding endeavor. This active witness of stewardship can take the form of serving as a catechist, classroom aide, substituting for a catechist or classroom aide, providing general office help, or working as a hall or traffic monitor.

*“Many the gifts, many the works,
one in the Lord of all” (1 Cor 12:4).*

If you would like to be of assistance, stop in the Religious Education Office or contact Colleen Nancarrow at 610-459-3477 or staprep@staglenmills.org. In your willingness to actively support our Program, you are reflecting the spirit of Jesus and witnessing the loving power of Christ in your life.

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

ATTENDANCE

Regular and continuous attendance at class is essential for a child's continuing faith formation. When a child does miss a class, if you are interested in completing the missed lesson or your catechist requests that you do, the lesson will be provided by contacting the Catechist. Completing a missed lesson does not replace an unexcused absence. Archdiocesan Policy considers three absences in a year to be excessive. If a child misses more than three onsite classes (More than one class for Home Catechesis Program), the Catechists & Faith Formation Director will assess the child's readiness to receive a Sacrament and/or their readiness for advancement to the next year.

Absences should be for serious reasons only. Excused absence includes illness of a student, or death in the family. For other urgent reasons, please call the Faith Formation Director.

- **For all absences, please use the following to report the absence. These forms can also be found on the PREP website. If the form is not received, your child's absence will be recorded as unexcused.**
 - **[Absence Form](#)**
- Extended absences due to illness require a doctor's note upon return to the program. In addition, parents should be in regular contact with their child's catechist in an effort to obtain assignments and keep their child's formation up-to-date when possible.

- After the third unexcused absence the Faith Formation Director will contact the parents by email to notify parents that the child is in jeopardy. If more unexcused absences occur, the child may be required to repeat the grade level.
- **ANY PARTICIPANT ACCUMULATING SIX UNEXCUSED ABSENCES WILL BE DISMISSED FROM THE PROGRAM.** The participant may re-enroll the following school year. Upon re-enrollment the participant will be required to repeat the previous grade level that was not completed. This process may delay the reception of sacraments.



LATENESS

When a student arrives late for class, he/she upsets the flow of the class and impairs personal progress. Every effort should be made for your child to arrive on time. If a child is consistently late, the Parents/Guardians will be contacted to discuss the situation.

EARLY DISMISSALS

Our time with the students is limited and early dismissals are discouraged. In the event that an early dismissal is necessary, the parent/guardian should email the PREP office prior to the start of class. At the time of the dismissal, the parent will ring the doorbell at the front entrance to the school. An aide will then escort the child to the entrance where the parent will sign the child out on the class sign-out sheet..

ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL

Participants should arrive at least 10 minutes prior to the scheduled start time of a program. All participants are to follow these arrival and dismissal procedures.

2024-25 Tuesday Afternoon Class Arrival & Dismissal **(NOTE -NEW for 2024-25)**

- **Arrival:** Arrival time will begin at 4:30. Please enter the parking lot from the NEW church driveway. **Proceed towards the school entrance and form a straight line to drop off your child at the front doors of the school. You do not need to wait until you reach the door to let your child out of the car if the child can exit safely to the sidewalk or grass.** After dropping off your child(ren),

please follow the car line straight ahead and around to the Chapel and follow the signs to exit to Valleybrook Road.

- A PREP assistant will be waiting to direct the children either to the playground or to the front doors of the school where they will enter the building.
 - During the nice weather, we will go to the playground before the bell rings for class at 4:45. Teachers will bring their class into the building
 - Please do not allow your children out of the car until you see the PREP assistant who is monitoring traffic.

- **Late Arrivals:** The bell to begin class will ring at 4:45. At that point the front doors will close. If you are late, park your car and walk your child to the front glass doors of the school and ring the bell. Someone will be there to let your child in and bring them to their class.

- **Dismissal:** For dismissal, the students will gather in the old gym/auditorium and sit with their class. The auditorium door closest to the main school entrance will open at 6:00. Parents are to enter the building & go to their child's teacher and sign out their child. Parent and child are to exit out the opposite door. Please notify the office by email if a child is going home with someone other than their parent. (For regular carpool arrangements, please place a note on file with our office at the beginning of the year or whenever you start to carpool).

ENROLLMENT & ATTENDANCE

The faith formation provided in our programs involves incremental learning. That is, each year builds upon the learning of the previous year. Therefore, it is essential that participants remain enrolled in the program consistently from year-to-year.

Any participant who voluntarily leaves the program for a period of time will be required to make-up the missed year(s) before entering into their current year. (e.g., a student who leaves the program for a period of one year after completing level 3 and re-enrolls in the program when they are in grade 5 will need to complete Level 4 before entering level 5). The procedure for completing the work will be discussed with parents and the Faith Formation Director to find a reasonable solution.

Children who enroll in the program later than first grade and have been baptized will be required to complete the missed levels. The completion of these levels will be determined by the parents and the Faith Formation Director. The Faith Formation Director, together with the parents will determine when the child is ready to receive sacraments or able to enroll into the appropriate level of instruction.

Our parish families are expected to enroll all eligible children in PREP (or attend Catholic school) until they complete the program in the fall of their 8th grade year. Younger siblings will be unable to enroll in the program if their older siblings leave the program before the fall of 8th grade. Exceptions require permission from the Pastor.

After completing the sacrament of Confirmation, students are encouraged to join a ministry or attend youth activities the parish provides.

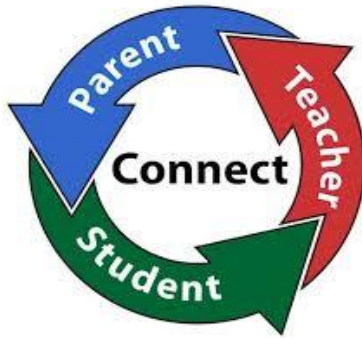
PARENT/GUARDIAN CUSTODY OF A CHILD

In custody situations where only one parent is to have contact with the child/children, the custodial parent must inform the Faith Formation Office. The document for proof of custody will be kept on file in the PREP Office. It is the responsibility of the custodial parent to provide the office with any changes.

DISCIPLINE

The PREP Program offered by St. Thomas the Apostle is designed to assist Parents with the faith formation of their children, as well as foster values and behaviors that are in accord with Catholic teaching.

Students are expected to display respect for administration, Catechists, adult volunteers, students, and the property belonging to others.



Our program has a No Tolerance Policy for behaviors that are contrary to Catholic faith and morals, including, but not limited to:

- bullying
- acts of obstinacy or improper language
- fighting
- physical, emotional or psychological intimidation
- vandalism
- demeaning behaviors such as name-calling, obscene language or gesture
- harassment

In the event a child engages in any of the listed behaviors or any other inappropriate conduct and has failed to respond to a Catechist's request to stop or correct the behavior, the Catechist will report the inappropriate behavior to the Faith Formation Director, who will speak with the child.

Following this conversation, a call will be made to his/her Parents/Guardians. If the behavior does not improve, the Parents/Guardians will meet with the Faith Formation Director and Catechist to discuss the procedures necessary to change the behavior.

DRESS CODE

All students attending PREP classes are expected to dress appropriately for class. Students may not wear shirts with offensive or inappropriate logos, language, or messages. In addition, students may not wear shoes that are harmful to the floors in the building or potentially harmful to themselves - baseball or football shoes with “cleats” and/or shoes with rollers.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES

We realize that devices such as smart watches and cell phones have become a necessary tool in keeping communications open with children, especially for working parents. It is the policy of this program that such devices will be put on silent mode and out of sight during the catechetical sessions. If a student brings a smartwatch, cell phone or any electronic device to PREP class, and it is being used by the student or becomes a distraction to the class, the Catechist may ask the student to put the device on the Catechist's desk until the end of the session. The Catechist may also use a general rule keeping all devices in a certain location during the class session.

SAFETY

• **FIRE/EVACUATION:** In the event of an actual fire or other emergency, directions for evacuation of the building are posted in each classroom. A fire/evacuation drill will be conducted in the beginning of the year so that all students and catechists are familiar with this procedure.

• **FIRST AID POLICY:** Every attempt is made to provide a safe and healthy environment. Since accidents sometimes do occur, and children may become ill quickly, the following procedure will be followed:

1. The Faith Formation Director will notify the Parents/Guardians. If they are unreachable, the emergency contact person will be called.
2. If neither of the above parties is available and/or time is of the essence, the Catechist or the Faith Formation Director will call 911. A PREP staff member will continue to call contact persons until someone is notified.

• **MEDICATION:** Except in extraordinary circumstances (which will be approved by the Faith Formation Director) the Religious Education personnel will not maintain or supervise the taking of medication. It is the responsibility of the Parents to inform and update the PREP Office about allergies and any other medical condition that would affect the safety of the child in the PREP program.

• **SHELTER IN PLACE:** Shelter in Place is an emergency response plan to the release of hazardous materials into the air or other dangerous situations. This response can only be called by the police or fire department. If our program were instructed to shelter in place, we would initiate our plan to protect the children. If Shelter

in Place is called, no one is permitted to leave or enter the building. It becomes our responsibility to care for the basic needs of our children until we are given permission to safely dismiss the students to their parents.

PHOTO/VIDEO PERMISSIONS

From time to time, our students may be photographed or recorded on video, and the resulting images posted on our PREP website, newsletter or social media pages. Children are not identified by name. Parents may opt out of having their children photographed by contacting the PREP Office in writing.

COMMUNICATION

Effective communication promotes a mutually supportive program. Parents are provided with a calendar at the beginning of the program year. Parents are asked to keep the PREP Office informed of a current email address.

1. Calendar & Newsletter

- Parents are provided with a yearly calendar at the beginning of the program year. The calendar will also be found on our website. ***This calendar is subject to change during the course of the year.*** Parents will be notified of changes. All changes will be communicated through our Option C email system.
- A monthly newsletter will be sent out through our Option C email system. Each month the newsletter contains important dates, parish activities, special events, helpful resources to enrich your family's faith and class level updates.

2. Parish Contact Information

Parents should feel free to contact the Faith Formation Director regarding any concerns or problems. Contact information:

Faith Formation Office Phone: 610-459-3477

[Parish Website](#)

[PREP Website](#)

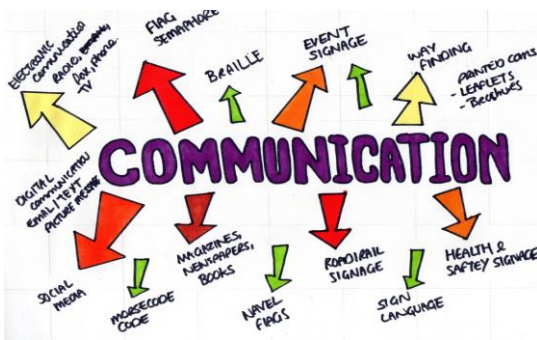
- Faith Formation Director
(Colleen Nancarrow) staprep@staglenmills.org
- Registration /Tech issues
(Maryanne Chestnut) mchestnut@staglenmills.org
- Office Manager/ Tuition
(Carmen DiBona) cdibona@staglenmills.org

3. Catechist Contact Information:

- Direct communication with your child’s catechist is also a necessary component of the catechetical process. Parents are encouraged to meet with their child’s catechist to discuss any concerns or information that will enhance their child’s learning experience. Use the STA email provided by your Catechist to communicate with him/her.

SNOW EMERGENCY & CANCELLATIONS

In the event of severe inclement weather, an Option C notification will be sent out to all families. You will receive an email and a text message informing you of the cancellation. We will also post announcements on our Website and social media pages. The lesson for that day will be completed at home by the students. Please note that if St. Thomas school and/or St. Thomas Parish announces a closure for the day, for any reason, any corresponding PREP session will also be cancelled.



CURRICULUM

St. Thomas the Apostle PREP will be using a combination of resources to develop lessons based on the guidelines set forth by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia for levels 1-6. We will use aspects of various programs to create an exciting learning experience for our children according to their age level. The following programs will help us foster this environment developing a love for our faith & a personal relationship with Jesus.

Traditional Program

- **Word of Life** Refer to the [WOL website](#) for more information on the program.
 - Word of Life is a comprehensive, multifaceted Pre-K–8 curriculum that calls children, parents, teachers, and catechists to conversion and transformation in Christ. It brings together faith and reason and demonstrates how the truths of the faith speak to the human heart.
 - It integrates salvation history, Theology of the Body, and other aspects of the curriculum using 21st century technology and age-appropriate material.
- **The Great Adventure Storybook (God’s Plan in Scripture):** [Ascension Press website](#)
 - The Storybook is the central component of the G.P.S. program. This beautifully illustrated book will guide students, children, and families to read through the Bible together in twenty-four lessons and features Bible reading checklists, summaries, references to sacraments and to the Catechism, and more. Catechists will supplement this with videos and other activities.

- **Encounter:** [website](#) This is a middle-school bible study program based on the Great Adventure Bible Timeline.
- **Theology of the Body:** [Sophia Institute](#) : Content from the “Everyday Theology of the Body” books is incorporated into the lessons of some grade levels.
- **Prayer Memorization:** Each grade level is required to know certain prayers. Prayer memorization is to be completed at home and demonstrated to the Catechists during the class sessions.

Home Catechesis Program

- Not offered in our Sacramental Prep years (levels 2 and 7)
- Parents teach their children from the Word of Life series and obtain lesson plans online. Student progress is automatically reported to the PREP office.
- The PREP office may supply additional seasonal lessons as well as mid-year and final assessments.
- Parents and children may be required to attend up to 5 monthly 90 minute class sessions.
 - Parents work with Faith Formation Director/Speaker on topics children will be learning for the upcoming months
 - Students go to classrooms with the Catechists to review the previous units. Liturgical Season Lessons will be presented for Advent and Lent. Students will also take mid-year and final assessments given by the PREP office.
 - Parent & child will complete a seasonal activity together
 - Dates of the sessions will be sent out during the summer to those registered
- Children are also expected to attend Weekly Mass, Confession during Advent and Lent, Liturgical Program Events, and complete a Saint Project.
- **Prayer Memorization:** Each grade level is required to know certain prayers. Prayer memorization is to be completed at home and demonstrated to the Catechists during the class sessions.

Summer Program

We offer an intensive, week-long summer program for levels 4-6, which covers the same material that is presented during the school year and will satisfy most of the student's classroom requirements for that grade level. In addition, the students experience a fun camp environment while practicing their faith and sharing fellowship with each other.

- The program is typically held in June during the first week after most schools are dismissed for the summer.
- In addition to the camp week, students must return 4 times during the school year to attend special classes based on the liturgical seasons (e.g. All Saints, Advent/Christmas, Lent/Easter and May/Mary)
- Students are expected to attend weekly Mass and participate in the sacrament of Reconciliation throughout the year.
- Registration for this program begins in January and ends in March so that appropriate preparations can be made.
- There is a fee over and above the standard PREP tuition for this camp. This covers the cost of extra materials as well as the hiring of professional teachers for these all-day sessions.
- No absences are permitted during the camp week. Any exception must be made by the Director. In addition, camp attendees may not miss the required 4 sessions during the school year. Any student who fails to attend the required sessions will not be permitted to enroll in the summer program the following year, and may jeopardize the completion of the current grade level.
- **Prayer Memorization:** Each grade level is required to know certain prayers. Prayer memorization is to be completed at home and demonstrated to the Catechists during the class sessions.

Confirmation Program

- Confirmation Preparation in PREP is a one-year process that begins in 7th grade & continues into the fall of 8th grade.
- *In 7th grade* our Catechists implement the Archdiocesan framework as well as the program below to ensure our students' readiness for the Sacrament.
- During the 2024-25 school year, we will use the "[Confirmed in the Spirit](#)" program by Loyola Press. Other resources will include [Decision Point](#) by Dynamic Catholic and the [Chosen](#) series from Ascension Press.

Our curriculum focuses on evangelizing young people and accompanying them as they become disciples. The curriculum addresses three big questions, "Why believe in God?", "Why trust Jesus?" and "Why be a part of the Church?"

- Candidates attend sessions during the school year covering the above material, or they may attend Camp Caritas to cover this requirement via a summer camp experience.
- Candidates attend a Confirmation Retreat
- Candidates select a Saint and confirmation name, and sponsor, and perform various works of mercy throughout the year.
- Candidates (and/or their families) must hand in all necessary forms to the Faith Formation Office

- ***By the Spring of 7th grade (see Calendar for due date)***
 - Candidates submit a Saint project
 - Candidates hand in logs of their Works of Mercy (5)
 - Candidates submit required information regarding their selection of a Confirmation Name and sponsor
 - Candidates complete final Assessment

- ***In the fall of 8th grade***
 - Candidates share their Saint Research with the Parish after our Sunday Masses
 - Candidates meet for rehearsal while awaiting their Confirmation Day

SPECIAL NEEDS

Our PREP Program is available for students with learning style differences and/or medical challenges. Parents/Guardians of any child with special needs participating in PREP should contact the Faith Formation Director to discuss how their child can be supported in their faith formation.

On the registration form, you will be asked to identify any disabilities for your child. Please refer to the following definition:

As defined by individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the term "child with a disability" means a child with: an intellectual disability, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance, an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, another health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP)

When registering or re-registering a child, who has an IEP from his/her public/private school, please provide the PREP Office with a copy of the IEP document or detailed information about your child's needs. An IEP can help guide us in making accommodations for a child. The document may be shared with the child's Catechist to ensure we are working to accommodate a child's needs. The IEP will be handled in a confidential manner by both the Faith Formation Director and Catechist.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT

The Archdiocese of Philadelphia has a Safe Environment policy in place. One lesson per year called “Kid Talk” is taught to the students in the second half of the year. You may view these lessons online prior to its being taught at <https://phillyocf.org/safe-environment/>. Parents may opt out of these lessons for their child by contacting the PREP Office in writing prior to the published date on which the lesson will be taught.

SACRAMENTS

SACRAMENT PREPARATION: RECONCILIATION AND EUCHARIST

The Archdiocese requires that Sacraments be received in the parish in which the family is registered. Sacramental preparation is the joint effort of the Parents/Guardians, Parish, and Catechists. At present, we celebrate First Reconciliation and First Eucharist in Year 2. A Parent Sacrament Forum is held at the beginning of the PREP year to give faith formation enrichment to the Parents/Guardians and to go over necessary details for the reception of the Sacraments.

To share in communion for the first-time children must have “sufficient knowledge and careful preparation so as to understand the mystery of Christ according to their capacity” (Code of Canon Law 913). Readiness is "determined in consultation among Priest, Parents/Guardians, Catechists, and child." In addition to the above, preparation for these sacraments includes the following:

- Registration in STA parish or permission from your Pastor to receive the Sacrament/s at STA
 - Receipt of a copy of the Child’s Baptismal Certificate
 - Attendance scheduled Religious Education classes and Communion Retreat
 - Attendance at Weekly Mass is expected
 - Knowledge of all required prayers and understanding of the Eucharist Preparation Text
 - Readiness to receive the Sacrament
 - Parent/s’ attendance at the Parent Sacrament Forum
 - Minimal absences (no more than 3)
- *Application

SACRAMENT PREPARATION: CONFIRMATION

It is the policy at St. Thomas the Apostle Parish that students continue their religious education **uninterrupted (levels 1-7)** through Confirmation. The Archdiocese requires that Sacraments be received in the parish in which the family is registered.

Sacramental preparation is the joint effort of the Parents/Guardians, Parish, and Catechists. At present we celebrate Confirmation in the Fall of Year 8. A Parent Sacrament Forum is held at the beginning of the PREP year 7 to give faith formation enrichment to the Parents/Guardians and review necessary details for the reception of the Sacrament. In addition to the above, Confirmation preparation includes the following:

- Registration at STA parish or permission from your Pastor to receive the Sacrament at STA
 - Prior reception of Sacraments of Baptism, Reconciliation, and First Eucharist
 - Attendance at Weekly Mass is expected
 - Attendance and successful completion of scheduled RE classes
 - Attendance at Confirmation Retreat
 - Knowledge of the Catholic Faith and an expressed desire for full membership
 - Completion of 5 Works of Mercy
 - Completion of Saints Research Project
 - Sponsor Certificate of Eligibility
 - Parent/s' attendance at the Parent Sacrament Forum
 - Minimal absences (no more than 3)
- *Application

TUITION & REGISTRATION

TUITION

Tuition is a necessary and required part of the religious education program to ensure the most current and best catechetical resources.

Tuition covers the cost of each student textbook as well as audiovisual materials, resource material, catechist training and other items purchased for use in the program.

In the 2024-25 School Year, we have a single registration for both the academic year program and the summer program. In that way, families who have children in more than one program can register at the same time and receive a family discount.

One Student..... \$225.00

Two Students..... \$375.00

Three or more Students..... \$475.00

\$25.00 Discount is applied to each family who registers before May 15th.

Summer program additional tuition: \$100 per child. This is paid separately from the standard tuition. Payment instructions will be provided at the time of registration.

A family discount is available for both the traditional and summer programs as well as combinations where families register multiple children at one time. Discount codes are provided in the registration instructions.

Camp Caritas students: Confirmation students who attend Camp Caritas, usually in the summer before 7th grade, register and pay for the camp through the sponsoring high school. In

addition, those students attend 4 sessions throughout the school year at St. Thomas. There may be a fee for materials and expenses. Payment instructions will be provided at the time of registration.

In the event that your child is dismissed from the program due to excessive absences, lateness, problem behavior, or for any other reason for dismissal, no refund of tuition or material fees will be made to the family.

If a family has a financial concern or difficulty, please contact the Faith Formation Director at the PREP Office (610-459-3477). No child will be denied religious education for financial reasons.

REGISTRATION

Registration for the coming school year takes place early in the calendar year, for the following school year.

Registration is online, using a CheddarUp collection site, and payment can be made online (a fee applies) or by cash/check to our office.

- We publish an announcement regarding registration for new families including incoming 1st graders in our parish bulletin, website and social media pages.
- We may also offer in-person registration after Masses in the spring/summer if resources permit. This will be announced in the bulletin or on website/social media.

Registration is first come-first served. We recommend registering as early as possible to ensure that your desired sessions are available. If sessions fill up, you may add your name to a waiting list. If your desired session is not available, some grades have a Homeschool program option.

Registration closes for our summer program on March 15 and for our traditional program on June 16. . Exceptions to this may be made only by the Faith Formation Director. Families who miss the registration deadline may contact the PREP office in September to inquire about remaining availability or may opt to complete the homeschool program for the current year.

Returning Families:

- We send an email registration invitation to all families currently in our program in the late winter.

New Families:

In order to register in our program, you must:

- Be registered in St. Thomas the Apostle parish. Contact the rectory at 610-459-2224 or visit the parish website at www.staparishgm.org for further information
- Fill out our [New Family information form](#) (also available on our website) to provide contact information plus the following
 - confirm parish registration
 - Provide us with a copy of your child's baptismal certificate – this is required both for children baptized at St. Thomas as well as those baptized at other parishes.
 - For any level other than 1 (1st grade), provide an official record of previous religious education noting the last level completed.

Once we receive the above, we will send you our PREP registration link.

- New families in the parish may register at any time during the year. If it is late in the school year, our office will help you determine the best solution to complete the current year and register for the next.
- All new families will attend an orientation with the Director of Religious Education in the fall to review our program's operation and expectations.

FINAL NOTE

The Faith Formation Director reserves the right to amend this handbook. In the event of any such amendment, parents will be given prompt notification of the changes made.

Last updated: August 29, 2024

